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Congregation of the Mission

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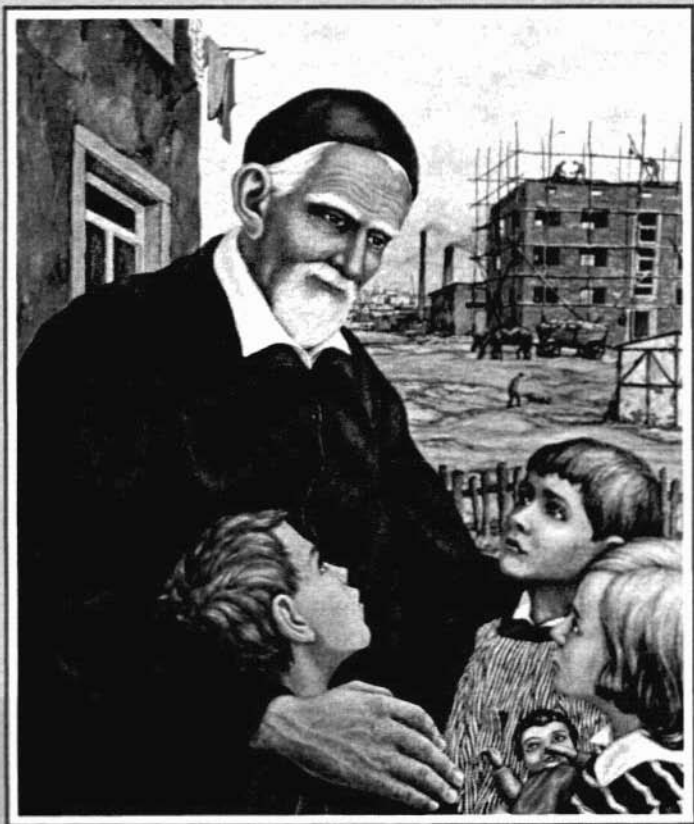
Congregation of the Mission. *Vincentiana*, 51, no. 3 (May-June 2007)

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VINCENTIANA

51th YEAR - N. 3

MAY/JUNE 2007



The Ongoing Formation of the Missionary Today Mexico 2007

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(2007:
May-June)

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

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GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 24 May 2007

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Tempo Forte (14-17 May) Circular

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

Among some of the more interesting subjects that we covered in our *tempo forte* meeting from 14-17 May were the following:

1. We discussed the question of reconfiguration in two parts. First of all, we considered the implications of the meeting we had with the three Visitors of the western part of the United States who are moving forward with the process of reconfiguration. They will give a presentation on the process to date at the Visitors' Meeting in Mexico. Secondly, we had an open discussion about reconfiguration in general. We see our role not as forcing reconfiguration, but rather encouraging confreres and provinces to think in that direction, as has been done so far. The issue will be discussed at the Visitors' Meeting in order to stimulate further thought. The justification of reconfiguration is based on Constitution 107, 3°. The key question that we must ask ourselves is: "Why reconfiguration? Will it help enable us to do the mission better?"
2. We talked about international activities the next of which is the New Visitors' Meeting to be held from 8-16 January 2008. The coordinator of that meeting will be Father Corpus Delgado, Visitor of Zaragoza. He is very experienced in this role. We spoke about the possibility of other events between now and 2010. We have an open date in January 2009 and considered having an international meeting dealing with publications and documentation of the Congregation.
3. Father José Antonio Ubillús, Assistant General for the Missions, and Father John Gouldrick, Treasurer General, presented the Mission Distribution Fund 2007.

4. Father Gouldrick also gave us an oral presentation, summarizing the meeting of the Financial Commission, which was held in the Curia a few days before our *tempo forte* meeting. The members of that commission are: Fathers Santiago Azcárate (Zaragoza), José Luis Fernández (Peru), Philippe Lamblin (Paris), Bernard Meade (Ireland), and Thomas Stehlik (South USA).
5. We selected the winners for the Mission Award, which will be announced publicly on the Feast of Saint Justin De Jacobis, 30 July. This time we received 11 projects, of which five were selected. The Treasurer General will be writing a letter to thank all the provinces for their participation and informing those who have won the award. In July, with the announcement of the winners, a brief description of each of the projects will be presented, as usual.
6. We had a report from the *Vincentiana* and *Nuntia* team. The report was given by the outgoing Editor, Father Alfredo Becerra in the presence of Father Julio Suescun, the new Editor of *Vincentiana* and *Nuntia*, as well as the website, CMGLOBAL. We selected a new Editorial Board for *Vincentiana*. It will be made up of Fathers Julio Suescun, Claudio Santangelo (Secretary General), Jean Landousies, and Manuel Ginete. With regard to the website, it is now to be understood that CMGLOBAL is the website for the international Congregation of the Mission, with a section on the General Curia. It will be available in the three official languages.
7. We are in the process of beginning a search for a new member of the CIF team. Father Juan Julián Díaz Catalán will complete his service in September 2008 and Father Hugh O'Donnell, the following year, September 2009. We hope to have a new member named by September of this year, so that he might be able to participate in some of the activities to learn the process of how CIF operates.
8. Once again we discussed the Vincentian Historical Sites and we considered the formation of a commission made up of members of the Vincentian Family to see how we might be able to improve our services, especially to the lay branches of the Vincentian Family, along the line of ongoing formation, pilgrimages, and updated equipment in order to make our historical sites more "visitor friendly."
9. With regard to the Solomon Islands, we discussed, and approved for discussion during the APVC Meeting in Mexico, an agreement that will be between the Superior General, who has overall responsibility for this mission, and the members of APVC.

10. With regard to our mission in Papua New Guinea, the missionaries there are beginning to receive petitions from possible candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. Their first year of experience will be in Papua New Guinea itself, in a parish which has recently been assigned to us by the Archbishop of Port Moresby.
11. We are in the process of negotiating with two candidates for the missions *ad gentes*, concerning their placement.
12. We received a letter from one of the bishops of Chad, requesting that we found a community of missionaries in his diocese. The Superior General will discuss this petition with the members of COVIAM in their meeting in Mexico.
13. We received a copy of the Statutes of the Interprovincial Internal Seminary for the Mediterranean sector of CEVIM. These will be confirmed and signed during the Visitors' Meeting in Mexico. The provinces involved in this Interprovincial Internal Seminary are: the four provinces of Spain, Portugal, the three provinces of Italy, the two provinces of France and the Province of the Orient.
14. Our ongoing formation session during this *tempo forte* was conducted by Father José María Nieto. He shared with us the rights and obligations in community living.

I ask the Spirit of the Lord to fill each of you with an abundance of his gifts and fruits during this time of Pentecost.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." with a stylized flourish at the end.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FEATURE:

International Meeting of Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission:

The Ongoing Formation of the Missionary Today

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

Director of "Vincentiana"

In this edition of *Vincentiana* we wish to present one of the important events in the recent history of the Congregation of the Mission: the International Meeting of the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission in Mexico. It can easily be understood that it would be impossible to put into words the total experience of the coming together of a group of brothers, united by one common vocation who experience the joy of gathering as friends who dearly love one another and who have opted to live together a common life in the Congregation of the Mission. Therefore, what was lived during the days of this meeting goes beyond the words of these pages. Those who did not live this experience can perhaps come to some remote understanding of what occurred there through the pages that follow.

The Preparatory Commission had been given four tasks: to enter more deeply into the theme of ongoing formation and to find a set of tools for specific programs in this area; to work with the agenda of the Superior General so that, in an open dialogue with him and his council, ideas concerning the good governing of the Congregation

might come to the surface; gather together as Conferences; and interrelate with one another during times of celebration, prayer, work and rest. The four tasks were accomplished. At this time we wish to share with you this information and *Vincentiana* has distinguished two great lines in the development of the meeting: reflection on the theme of ongoing formation and the presentation of the agenda of the Superior General.

With regard to the theme of ongoing formation, *Vincentiana* has gathered together the presentations that provided a foundation for reflection, the process that marked the path for the reflection groups and the results of this journey as seen in the summaries that were presented by those who synthesized the thoughts of the different groups.

The agenda of the Superior General includes all that he does directly or through his delegates or officials at the Curia to serve the Congregation. Many activities were presented but because of space we are obliged to limit ourselves to simply listing these as they appear in the chronicle of this gathering. Only one of those activities, the concern for the Vincentian Family, appears in a developed manner and was presented by Father Manuel Ginete, C.M., delegate of the Superior General to the Vincentian Family. Among the other activities presented we highlight, because of interest and the broad scope of the presentation, the intervention of Father John Gouldrick, C.M., the Treasurer General, "A Plan of Vincentian Solidarity Moves Forward." *Vincentiana* is preparing an edition dedicated to this theme.

In this edition there is not enough space to speak about the profound and joyful living together which highlighted our interrelationships and which, without a doubt, was a factor in uniting minds and hearts. I refer here to our time of retreat, to the daily celebrations, to the spontaneous dialogues at table or during our social hour, to the excursion and to an infinite number of details that speak about the closeness and fraternity of missionaries who live geographically distant from one another but very close to one another in their concerns, interests and sentiments.

(CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M., translator)

Participants at the Meeting

G. Gregory Gay, Superior General

Józef Kapuściak, Vicar General

José María Nieto, Assistant General

Gérard Du Tran Cong, Assistant General

José Antonio Ubillús, Assistant General

John Gouldrick, Treasurer General

Visitors and Vice-Visitors

Guests and Technicians



Preparatory Commission

Daniel P. Borlik (Mer)
Yves Bouchet (Tol)
Francisco Solás (Ven)
Michael Ngoka (Nig)
Antonius Sad Budianto (Ids)

Curia Technical Commission

José Antonio Ubillús c.m.
John W. Gouldrick c.m.
Alfredo Becerra c.m. (Mex - Curia)

Mexico Technical Commission

Silvestre Sánchez c.m.
Marcelino Cárdenas c.m.
Rafael Murillo c.m.
Leopoldo Ruano c.m.
Two theology students

General Secretariat

Claudio Santangelo c.m.
Sister Ann Mary Dougherty D.C.
Sister Marie Claire Narainen D.C.
Sister María Pilar López D.C.

Chronicler

Julio Suescun c.m. (Cae - Curia)

Synthesizers

Giuseppe Turati c.m. (Tau)
Manuel Ginete c.m. (Phi - Curia)

Translators

Félix Álvarez c.m. (Mt)
Joseph Cummins c.m. (Orl)
Eric Ravoux c.m. (Par)
Pascal Bremaud c.m. (Par)
Roberto Gómez c.m. (Tol)
John Rybolt c.m. (Ocn)

Guests

Hugh O'Donneell c.m. (CIF - Sin)
Patrick McDevitt c.m. (Ocn)
Carl Pieber c.m. IDO (Orl)
Peter Campbell c.m. VSO (Orl)
John Rybolt c.m. History Project C.M. (Ocn)
Juan Julián Díaz Catalán (CIF - Cae)
Emilio Melchor c.m. Executive Secretary CLAPVI (Ven)
Brian Moore c.m. New Visitor (Hib)

Homily Opening Eucharist, Visitors' Meeting

Monday, 4 June 2007, Mexico

Readings: Tobit 1:3; 2:1a-8; Mark 12:1-12

"I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life," so says the author at the beginning of the book that tells the story of Tobit. "I _____ also walk in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life and I perform many acts of charity for the members of my province and for the people of God whom our province is called to serve."

My brothers, today we begin our meeting, the meeting of all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, together with the Superior General and his Council. Hopefully, there will be an opportunity in the course of this two-week period to share our stories with one another. And hopefully we can do so in order to encourage one another to be more faithful in the service that God has called us to do for the well-being of each of the members of the Congregation of the Mission and especially for the Poor.

It is interesting that both the readings, that the Universal Church presents for our reflection today, are about responsibility in carrying out what God has entrusted to the leaders of his people. On the one hand, in the Book of Tobit, even in face of defying the orders of the so-called civil society, Tobit carries out his responsibility, showing utmost respect for the dead, whose bodies had been discarded, and giving them proper burial. It is evident that he thinks more of his duty toward others, and toward his people, than his own concerns. Before he reclined to eat, he sent his son to invite every poor person to eat with him together at table. He was even able to mourn, to express the full depth of his sorrow, weeping as he buried those who had been assassinated. His fear was in the Lord and not of those who tried to determine or limit the exercise of his responsibility. In the Gospel, on the other hand, we see the irresponsibility of those to whom the vineyard of the Lord had been entrusted.

In these days, all of us, Visitors, Superior General and Assistants, will have the opportunity to reflect on the carrying out of our responsibilities. The meeting is, as you know, divided into two major parts. One will be a section on ongoing formation. Among the priorities of the Visitor, as our Constitutions state, is providing for

the ongoing formation of the members of his province. This is done in order to guarantee that the quality of service, as shown to God's people on the part of the confreres, is the very best that we can give. The other part of our time here together will be spent in dialogue: the members of the various Conferences of the Congregation among themselves and the Superior General and his Assistants with all the Visitors in discussion about the different services that we are called to provide for the well-being of the entire membership of the Congregation of the Mission. I certainly hope that, in this way, we might support each other, as well as encourage one another in the deepening of our responsibilities in the service of the Congregation of the Mission.

Tobit looked not first at his own needs, but at the needs of his fellow men, even those in the most desperate situations, doing his utmost to care for them. That is certainly how we must understand our role as servant-leaders in the Congregation of the Mission. We should have an attitude of caring and of openness. We need to listen to those who are our immediate responsibility, the confreres of the different provinces. We must also have a real concern for the care of those in our service, especially the Poor.

One of the underlying themes in both readings is the utmost respect that we, as human beings, are called to have for one another. Now we have the opportunity to reflect on that respect as shown to our brothers, to the Poor, to other members of the Vincentian Family. In respecting them, we encourage them to come to know more deeply the love that Jesus Christ has for them and we animate them to walk faithfully in his footsteps.

Let me point out a number of ways in which we might check on our responsibilities and also highlight some of the more significant areas where we are called to be responsible.

First and foremost, given that we are members of the Congregation of the Mission, whose mission is to be faithful in following Jesus Christ, evangelizing the Poor, we, as servant-leaders, must do our utmost to guarantee that our apostolates are in the midst of the Poor and that all of us, in growing close to the Poor, live our vocation in a responsible way, with a special concern for those most marginalized and abandoned in our societies. We, as servant-leaders, can even become prophetic witnesses, leading the way, so that those under our charge might be encouraged and animated to do the same.

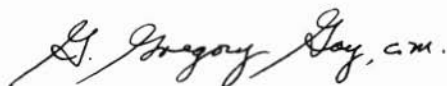
Secondly, we are encouraged to foster the spiritual well-being of the members under our responsibility. As Saint Vincent encourages us, we are called to be men of prayer, praying in an open way and from our own experience of God as he speaks to us through our experience of the Poor.

Thirdly, we must be coherent, so that what we say, we also do. We practice what we preach. We have to be at the forefront in encouraging more by action than by words.

Finally, we have responsibility for the formation of our local communities. That is prophetic and gives tremendous witness to the society in which we live. The world today is torn by division, violence, lack of respect for one another. Peoples of different cultures, races and even creeds are unable to live in harmony and peace with one another. So, as servant-leaders, we are called to encourage that living together in mutual, supportive communities, which pray together, share significant moments with one another, recreate together, relax with one another and do so without making distinctions among one another. We must be, as Saint Vincent encourages us, good friends, who love one another.

The responsibility of servant-leadership in our world today is certainly not easy. In fact, humanly speaking, it is impossible. But, as men of faith, we know that for God, and by his grace, all things are possible.

As we gather around the table of the Lord, the source and sign of our own unity, as brothers in the Lord Jesus and with one another, let us partake together of this meal so that we might be nourished, refreshed and reenergized, in order to walk in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of our life, performing those many acts of charity for our confreres and the Poor, whom we are called to serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." in a cursive script.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General

Daily Chronicle

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

Monday, 4 June 2007: A warm welcome

The meeting of the CM Visitors began, as usual, with the celebration of the Eucharist. Around the table of the Lord, listening to his word and strengthening ourselves by communing with his body and blood, we felt like a community called together by the Lord to carry out his plan of love for the poor of today.

In his homily, the Superior General urged the Visitors to examine carefully the development of their responsibilities in order to guarantee that the ministries of their respective provinces would be an expression of fidelity to our vocation as followers of Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, to promote the spiritual well-being of the confreres under their responsibility, to be coherent that what we do mirrors our words, and to take great care in the formation of our local communities.

This was, without doubt, a mutual warm welcome of all of us before the Lord, who has summoned and assembled us.

Then, the morning was spent in many other signs of welcome in our own community circumstances.

The Visitor of Mexico, Father Luis Arreola, presented to us the land that welcomes us, the Church that inhabits this land and the reality of the province that is hosting this gathering. His words were full of realism and open to hope. He expressed in them the joy and the privilege with which his province welcomes the presence of such an important representation of the entire Congregation, coming from all over the world.

The president of the Preparatory Commission made some practical observations for the good order of the meeting in a house which is practically unknown to everyone. This was also the moment to acknowledge the silent and difficult work of all those who made up the Technical Commission, done to facilitate the entry of everyone into Mexico, and to be sure that the house of the Episcopal Conference of Mexico (CEM) would be ready in the best possible way.

The Vice-Visitor of Nigeria, Father Michael Ngoka, following the analysis of the replies of the Visitors to the letter of the Preparatory Commission, explained the importance, need and urgency of Ongoing Formation, always in process.

Father Francisco Solás explained the methodology of the meeting by recalling its goals as set forth in the letter of the Superior General that convoked it, and Father Solás pointed out the four tasks that had to be accomplished to arrive at the goals: to deepen the theme of Ongoing Formation and to find the tools to carry it out in practice; to work on the agenda of the Superior General, by suggesting in open dialogue with him and his council, ideas for the good government of the Congregation; to meet in Conferences; and to develop mutual relations in moments of common prayer, work, and rest. He described the different kinds of groups in which the Visitors would meet, and finished by noting the committees that are still active, as well as certain duties, such as the synthesizers or the chronicler who would help in gathering ideas or in communicating with the provinces by means of <http://cmglobal.org/es> and <http://cmglobal.org/en/news>

The Superior General introduced each of the new Visitors, the ones who had begun their service since the last General Assembly, along with other participants in the meeting, who are not Visitors, but who are giving some service to the Congregation on the general level.

The various Conferences had a festive presentation. Father Yves Bouchet, the Visitor of Toulouse, accompanying himself on the guitar, sang a few verses in which were described the various Vincentian activities and concerns that were then attributed to each of the Conferences, and which the chorus received with a refrain. He watched the raised hands in an invitation to work together to make effective the service of the poor, which is the service of Jesus Christ. In this way the various conferences, APVC, CEVIM, COVIAM, CLAPVI, NCV, were presented as bearers of the love of the Congregation, and desirous of sharing and realizing the hopes of the men of today, hopes burdened with the diversity of cultural riches, and ready to reflect and celebrate, being faithful to the spirit of Saint Vincent.

In the second part of the morning, the theme of Ongoing Formation made its appearance in the main hall through the well constructed and well presented conference of Father Hugh O'Donnell, Director of CIF. With this conference we began the first task of this meeting, of deepening and advancing in our appreciation, understanding and planning of Ongoing Formation. The afternoon was filled with group work under the expert and informed guidance of Father Patrick J. McDevitt, professor at DePaul University, Chicago.

Tuesday, 5 June 2007: Formation as job number one

The theme of ongoing formation, which already began in the main hall during the afternoon of Monday, 4 June, was developed today, the 5th, at two levels. The professorial presentations were by Father Hugh O'Donnell and the process of construction on the basis of the groups took place under the technical guidance of Father Patrick McDevitt.

Father O'Donnell yesterday presented Ongoing Formation as a process that has to move from what is basic. He indicated how this should be done without losing the good that we have already attained, that we should not be confined within it, without being always attentive to the signs of our time, but advancing to other new realities. He based his reflection on our Constitutions, which present to us the following of Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor, as the goal of our Congregation. These Constitutions always affirm that the Congregation, ever attentive to the Gospel, to the signs of the times and to the more urgent calls of the Church, should open new ways and apply means adapted to the circumstances of time and place, and should try besides to examine and order our works and ministries, thereby remaining at all times in a state of continual renewal.

Today, Father O'Donnell described for us the way of Saint Vincent, the process of developing a life, which is a process of ongoing formation. His person continually makes real for us the ideal of following Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor. His way is also our way, our path.

The process for group study is moving along slowly, but surely. Starting from what we live and from our hopes for the future, we are refining the principles that have to be the foundation of our ongoing formation, in the various steps of our own personal development. In a scholarly presentation of developmental psychology, Father McDevitt presented to us today the various stages of personal development, so that we could keep them in mind when we describe a process for ongoing formation. The communications from the small groups and in the large group were very abundant and rich. Let us hope that the process will continue to go well.

The program of the meeting also includes other activities, among which is what is being called the Agenda of the Superior General. Today the Superior General wished to present two activities that, with his council, he is making his own.

First, he gave the floor to Father John Rybolt, who presented the status of the History Project of the Congregation as of April 2007. It is moving along well, and it allows us to hope that in the near future we will have a complete History of the Congregation.

Then, the Superior General presented CIF as the most important institution that the Congregation has for the ongoing formation of our members. Recalling that it is an institute depending on the Curia, which has as its delegate one of the Assistants General, Father Ubillús, he then left the presentation in the hands of Fathers Hugh O'Donnell and Juan Julián Díaz Catalán, who presented to us what it is, what it does, what it costs, and what CIF can accomplish for the Congregation. They did this with clarity and beauty.

Wednesday, 6 June 2007: Under the banner containing the logo

Wednesday, the third day of the Visitors' Meeting, did not have any special character. During the morning, before the usual period of prayer, the members assembled for an official photo, and then the ordinary routine of the other days began. Father Hugh O'Donnell laid out the various resources that we could use to advance on this voyage that we want to take, moving from our own reality to the ideal that we are pursuing, to move, as Saint Vincent did, from being a self-centered seeker after benefices to being a great organizer of all the resources that he encountered in the service of the poor. Father O'Donnell kept inviting us to value what had already been accomplished in the Community and the Church, to recognize the value of the very persons of the confreres, to appreciate the potential



good that ongoing formation offers us, to discover a positive attitude toward change and conversion, to be grateful for the goodwill of the confreres, and finally to know how to take advantage of the rich and varied collaboration that people of good will offer us.

Then Father Patrick McDevitt continued his work of directing to a safe harbor the search that we have begun. First, the group listed various concrete resources that we can count on, then in small groups, and finally in the plenary session, it worked to lay out the concrete lines of action that should be developed out of what we perceive in our own reality and leading to the expectations that we have to bring something to our provinces. It was not an easy task. Just when it seemed that the door was open, a new intervention made us think that there was a long way to go to get out of here. All the interventions were very important, but each one made the way a little more difficult. Where were we going? What are we supposed to do? Tomorrow may bring a solution. As with all procedures, this too needs some time to mature in order to arrive at the result for which we are hoping.

Amid all the comings and goings, this chronicler had time again to examine the fine logo that greets us everywhere, and which the readers can see in the opening image of this chronicle. It is the graphic design of a theological student in the Province of Paris, Alexis Cerquera. He has a real sense of pre-Columbian cultures. There is a diversity of forms which all together give an impression of unity. So we could read that the theme is "To inculturate unity amid diversity in the Aztec lands." But after the fatigue of today's sessions, we could also understand the logo as the labyrinth in which we find ourselves, and from which we are anxious to exit.

In the final session of the afternoon, we had the continuation of what we are calling the Agenda of the Superior General. We had presentations today about SIEV and the Office of Communications.

Concerning SIEV and its plans, both long-term and short-term, Father Elie Delplace, the Visitor of Paris and a member of SIEV, gave a well-ordered, rousing and enthusiastic presentation. To situate this institution in its trajectory, which is somewhat unknown among the confreres, Father Julio Suescun, the Executive Secretary of SIEV, noted some small historical details and pointed out some of the results inspired by SIEV.

Vincentiana, *Nuntia* and the website were presented by Father Alfredo Becerra, until recently the director of these efforts in the Curia. In a fine PowerPoint presentation, he gave a report on his work, and asked the participants to give their collaboration to the new director, Father Julio Suescun. The latter took the occasion to present the situation of reorganization of the website, with one exclusively for the CM, and which will have a common address:

<http://cmglobal.org>, from which one can access the various versions. Until now, only the Spanish and English versions are up and working. The English one has, for now, the address: <http://cmglobal.org/en/news/>.

Thursday, 7 June 2007: The journey's end

I am not talking about the journey that brought us to Mexico. The Meeting of the Visitors is still in its first third. But Father O'Donnell today held the last of his four conferences. He described the process of Ongoing Formation as a journey that we all have to make, just as Saint Vincent did. This journey brings us to the interior of ourselves to recognize our reality and to move us toward converting ourselves into a man realized in Christ, conformed to the ideal of our vocation. Saint Vincent made this journey that brought him from his ambitious search for benefices to being the great saint of charity. We have, then, come to the end, not perhaps because we have reached the goal of our journey, but because we have seen the end of its description as outlined by Father O'Donnell. Our technical experts, Father McDevitt and Miss María José Pacheco, who were the facilitators of our studies, both completed their work. We sent them off with grateful applause.

The group did not arrive at any precise goal, but at various times new plans were presented that, in the end, were not satisfactory. Certainly the theme needs much more reflection to come to maturity. But the materials are all here. We then can finish what we have begun.

During the afternoon, the "Agenda of the Superior General" continued. Today, it was the turn of the Vincentian Family. Father Manuel Ginete, Delegate of the Superior General for the Vincentian Family, laid out the development of the Family during the last few years, as well as the participation by the Office of the Vincentian Family in this development. He described his work and that of Sister María Pilar López, a Daughter of Charity from the Province of Barcelona, as persons serving this office full-time. Father Ginete relied on a PowerPoint presentation to keep the attention and interest of all in the hall during the long tour of his well-outlined and clear presentation.

Ecofavi is the name that is used for the Coordinating Team of the Vincentian Family of Mexico. The entire group, composed of various representatives of each branch of the Family, attended Father Ginete's presentation, and then, after the recess, it was their turn. They were introduced by Father Benjamín Romo, a member of the team as a representative of the C.M., and each one presented the origin, current status and future perspectives of the branches of the Vincentian Family in Mexico. It was a lengthy presentation, since



there was a lot to talk about, but, despite its length, it was well done, entertaining and varied.

These presentations certainly helped to affirm in us the love for a vocation that is supported through the Vincentian charism, shared today by so many lay people, committed to and engaged in the service of Christ in the poor of our time, following the inspiration and the thought of Saint Vincent, and who are commended to his care.

Friday, 8 June 2007: Full agenda

The day was very full and varied. After the work in language groups, the day began with a revision of the synthesis prepared by the synthesizers, Fathers Manuel Ginete and Giuseppe Turati. They presented their work and the members of the assembly pointed out some gaps and imprecision. That was precisely what the synthesizers were looking for — that the group help them to complete their synthesis which will be presented at a later moment. Afterwards the whole day was devoted to the Superior General's Agenda, i.e., to what he wanted to share with the Visitors.

First came an open dialogue about the Vincentian places, introduced by the Superior General and then followed by the

Assistants who have the most knowledge of these matters. It was easy to see that the group was in agreement with making these sites more adequate as places of pilgrimage and encounter for the whole Vincentian Family.

Afterwards the Superior General presented Brother Peter Campbell and the Vincentian Solidarity Office. In a clear and orderly way, Brother Peter presented the office and its work at the service of the Congregation. He invited us to visit the website and to get to know the projects and mini-projects that are being carried out, as well as the conditions and the ways to apply for new grants. The assembly received his intervention with grateful satisfaction.

Then came the presentation of Father Carl Pieber and the new International Development Office. The Superior General noted that, although this office is located in the same building and on the same floor as the Vincentian Solidarity Office, it is a different entity. In this case it has the task of gathering funds to create a patrimony for the subsistence of the poorer provinces. Father Pieber referred us to a longer document of his on how we should understand the idea of development. Then he opened his arms to receive any kind of support which would further the objective of his office. After a brief dialogue, Father Pieber finished up to a round of applause.

Following the instructions received in the last General Assembly, the Superior General presented and distributed a possible Process for the Election of the Superior General. This project was listened to and debated in groups and in the plenary session. Later on the process will be presented again taking into account the suggestions made.

On our desks we found five reports: from the Procurator General to the Holy See and the Postulator General, Father Giuseppe Guerra; the Commission for Systemic Change; the Vincentian representative to the United Nations; and Father John Freund, on the internet as an instrument for our mission. The Superior General told us these documents were not for discussion, but rather as a basis for a future open dialogue, just as the program for this meeting contemplates.

The intense pace of the work cried out for some down time, for a party. We had just that after supper. The participation of the different Visitors' Conferences showed clearly the great richness and cultural and folkloric diversity we have in the Congregation, much to the delight of all.

Saturday, 9 June 2007: Looking inside myself

Following the established program, Saturday was designated as a retreat day. Daniel Vásquez, the Visitor of Colombia, led the reflections. As usual, morning prayer was done in language groups. At 9:00 a.m. we concelebrated the Eucharist with Father Daniel as

the principal celebrant; he preached his homily using the texts of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and Luke 4:16-30. He urged us to be prophets of the Spirit and the word, men moved by the Spirit to find in God's word, in our Constitutions and Statutes and in the rich Vincentian tradition the perennial newness and richness of our charism; men who make the word the norm of their lives, learning to discern by its light the signs of the times; men rooted in the love which never passes away, which preserves us from hypocrisy, frees us from whatever springs from selfishness and allows us to be seen as men who love.

Later, in his conference, he continued exhorting us to center ourselves on the two poles of our vocation — Christ and the poor. United to Christ we can be the living, active presence of the love of God for the poor.

The Blessed Sacrament was exposed all morning to allow the confreres to contemplate this presence that expresses a love that is infinitely inventive.

At noon, Father Vasquez led us in a serious examination of conscience and at 1:00 p.m., we had repetition of prayer in which several confreres participated. To set the mood for this, a beautiful graphic presentation of the Vincentian virtues, drawn from a mural depicting these virtues that was recently hung in the Madrid Provincial House, was shown. The morning of retreat was a truly brotherly encounter, which provided a space of serene joy for all.

In the afternoon, following the dynamic of shared communication, the Visitors met in groups to interchange their experiences of their jobs. They were invited to respond to two questions: "Challenges the Visitor has to face today" and "Internal and external challenges which the province must face." It was a peaceful dialogue whose results were later shared in the plenary session.

Tomorrow the Virgin of Guadalupe awaits us in her Basilica. There we will concelebrate the Eucharist and present to the Lord, through her intercession, all our personal and apostolic intentions.

Sunday, 10 June 2007: At the foot of Tepeyac

Today, Sunday, was a day to take a rest from our labors and enjoy ourselves. We left our work place and went to noisy Mexico City. After being closed in for a week, we were thankful to see new faces. At 9:00 a.m. two buses took us to a place near the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In that immense and lovely basilica, other members of the Vincentian Family awaited us. Together with them and many other people, who had come together to celebrate the Lord's Day under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we celebrate a joyful Eucharist. The basilica was full, and in the

sanctuary there were about one hundred priests with the Superior General. It was a beautiful celebration prepared in detail by the various Vincentian Family groups.

In his homily, based on the first and third readings of the day, the Superior General insisted that God has revealed himself and wants to continue revealing himself as the God of Life. Like Elijah and like Jesus himself, we have been called and sent as prophets and witnesses of the God of Life. Our Christian and Vincentian vocation impels us to approach so many people marginalized from life in order to place in them the "breath of life" and to welcome them into our embrace and present them, thus renewed, to their mother. We are called to bring them back from the margin and accompany them in their reintegration into the human family, to the family of the Church which, under Mary's protection, celebrates Christ's presence in its midst.

There was almost no time to walk around the basilica and investigate the many expressions of popular religiosity found there. There were many family groups who approached the basilica to visit their Mother to implore her favor or give her thanks for her protection. There were a surprising number of mothers, with children in their arms, who asked for our blessing.

Later, in the Provincial House, the party continued, now very much a family affair. The community's ability to receive and welcome us all in a limited space with such attention and affection is something for which to be grateful and to admire. A group of mariachis came to enliven the gathering; and they made the Mexican souls of Fathers Arreola, Roma and Muñoz thrill to the music. They were so moved, they put on Mexican sombreros and sang for us.

After lunch a bus tour allowed us to discover, most of us for the first time, a modern, well-constructed city with wide avenues and spacious parks. The commentary we heard from the guide made everyone want to prolong his/her stay in this charming city, not with another bus tour, but rather taking time to delve into its history and culture.

After the tour we boarded other buses and returned to our meeting place for supper because tomorrow will be another work day in our temporary Mexican home.

Tuesday, 12 June 2007: Implementation of a plan of solidarity

One of the tasks indicated on the program for the Visitors' Meeting was to provide time for the Visitors to meet by Conferences. This was done all day Monday and on Tuesday morning. This chronicler can attest, judging by the time passed in the Conference meetings, that the work was intense. Up until now no information

from these Conference meetings has come to the assembly hall. That was why there was no chronicle on Monday. One thing did come out of the Europe and Middle East Conference; they announced they had signed the Statute for the Interprovincial Internal Seminary. But this was in overtime and it went through a rather singular route as was described in the information published on [cmglobal](#).

Tuesday afternoon brought other matters. The whole assembly began an open dialogue with the Superior General. In this session the first point was to respond to the written questions that had been presented. They were very few, only two; they centered on the relationship between the autonomy of the provinces and the authority of the Superior General over the whole Congregation and the vision the Superior General has after his many visits to the various provinces and missions. He commented on the spirit of faith with which the whole Congregation and the Vincentian Family receive the successor of Saint Vincent; he blessed God for the zeal and the love of the poor he found in the missionaries. But he questioned an excess of activism and the loss of a more contemplative spirit. The questions from the floor were also few in number, and, in general, they expressed gratitude for the impulse to the Vincentian spirit that the visits of the Superior General brought to the different provinces.

After the break came a wonderful lesson on the implementation of the Vincentian solidarity plan by the Treasurer General, Father John Gouldrick. With the help of some PowerPoint slides, so we could keep track of the numbers and the structure, he laid out for us the Financial Plan being directed from the General Curia.

He pointed out the three objectives for this plan: increase the cash flow so that all the provinces can meet their ordinary basic and pastoral needs; make capital improvements; and establish endowment funds for the long-term needs of the provinces.

He reminded us that the plan was set in motion in the generalate of Father Maloney, and that the three objectives were being pursued by three different structures responsible to the General Curia. The first of these is the IMF:2000. This was established in Father Maloney's time with the help of a charitable foundation, which required that the Congregation supply matching funds to the foundation's grant. This was done through the generous help of the provinces, especially of Europe and the United States. Lately other provinces have become donor provinces as well, and two former recipient provinces have now become donor provinces. To respond to the second objective the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO) was created. In this meeting, Brother Peter Campbell presented a clear and detailed report about his work. To respond to the third objective the International Development Office was created. Father Carl Pieber,

together with the Superior General and the Treasurer General informed us that the goals of this office (namely, the establishment of patrimonial or endowment funds for the provinces) will be pursued with the help of all. Father Gouldrick emphasized that this financial plan wants to give concrete expression to a desire to share the responsibility of being the stewards of the patrimony of the poor. Father Gouldrick's intervention ended with applause that expressed everyone's satisfaction with his report.

Afterwards came three brief reports by the Superior General: insistence on the creation of Financial Councils in the provinces, the need to unify the system of communication between the Curia and the provinces through the internet, and the report of the Commission for Systemic Change.

At the end of the session came a presentation from the Commission on the Revision of the Statutes of the C.M. This report will be taken up later by the Visitors.

Wednesday, 13 June 2007: Brotherhood in work and in celebration

One of the aspects of the agenda of this Visitors' Meeting consisted in just meeting and fraternizing. There were prayer meetings, in particular the morning prayer ending with the celebration of the Eucharist, and the evening Vespers, and several other short but intense prayers at the beginning and at the end of the different sessions. We should also include here the morning retreat, which we mentioned in a previous chronicle. The work sessions have taken up most of the time. Whether in plenary sessions or meeting by linguistic groups, the Visitors have had the opportunity of listening to one another and of feeling close to one another in the ideals of the same missionary vocation.

But now I would like to inform about meetings in festive celebrations. We could say that in this field the experiences have also developed by degrees, beginning with the short periods of time after dinner, accompanied by mariachis or by an instrumental wind quintet, other times using our modest personal resources, until the explosive show of brotherhood on our Wednesday excursion. This excursion appeared on the program as reserved for a visit to Teotihuacán. This word, which to many of us was a real tongue-twister, but which later on would become still more of a twister through the names of gods and goddesses, did not say much to most of us. But the visit itself went way beyond what we could have imagined. We found ourselves submerged in the prehistory of Mexico, amidst a people that lived there from 500 BC to 600 AD, and who, although they never discovered writing, were capable of leaving numerous and great showings of amazing buildings and urban complexes, of their religious feelings, of their knowledge of the

heavenly bodies, and their great capacity for commercial activities. Regretfully, it seems that they also fell into the vices of our times, and their desire for instant enjoyment impeded their perpetuation in those lands. Deforestation brought about climatic change, and the subsequent scarcity of rainfall changed their rich lands into dry desert which they were obliged to abandon under threat of dying from hunger. When the Aztecs arrived there, a place already uninhabited, they named it "abode of the gods," Teotihuacán.

All the walking under the sun, and going up and down the steep steps of the Pyramid of the Moon, an effort reserved for the more daring, caused us to desire a much needed rest. We found it in the restaurant where a good repast had been prepared: an abundant buffet menu, accompanied once more by the mariachis and a pre-Hispanic dance which brought to mind again the long cultural history of this nation.

We went back home early, after a short visit to the former convent of the Augustinians in Acolman. This was another contact with the religious history of Mexico, in a convent that saw the birth of the "Misas de aguinaldo," or "Posadas" (a nine-day popular celebration before Christmas Day), that later on would spread all over the continent in order to replace the celebrations of the native populations in honor of the birth of the god Huitzilopochtli from his mother Coatlicue.

At the end of the meeting, it is time to recognize and to thank the confreres of the Province of Mexico for their excellent work in preparing all the aspects of this meeting. We have to thank, once more, the great work of Father Silvestre Sánchez and his team, Brother Marcelino, Brother Rafael, and the students Toribio and Joel. They do not miss a single detail. They have literally foreseen everything. Still more to be admired, they never give the least sign of ill humor or of being tired, even if they might very well wish that this whole celebration come to its end.

Thursday, 14 June 2007: As the meeting nears its end

This time the Latin proverb "*post festum pestum*" — which implies that after a celebration there is not much craving for work — has not come true, because on the day following the excursion, in spite of some cramps, the agenda has been kept in its entirety.

A paper was given out with several questions in order to evaluate the meeting, paper to be given back, duly completed, to the secretariat. In the name of the Commission on the Revision of the Statutes, which had already made its presentation on Monday, Father Turati kept us busy the whole morning. In the first place, he explained briefly the procedure. Afterwards, first in small groups and then in plenary session, corrections and recommendations were

presented so that a better and more detailed presentation could be ready for the 2010 General Assembly. A few other recommendations and remarks also were offered spontaneously in the plenary session.

In the afternoon, Father Thomas F. McKenna, Visitor of the Eastern Province of the United States, presented, along the same lines as the main purpose of this meeting, an instrument for helping in Ongoing Formation. It consists in an online study of the Constitutions prepared under the direction of Father John B. Freund, which is being studied in different sessions to the great satisfaction of those who peruse it. There is also a CD in English and in Spanish with the first six sessions to which further sessions could be added if the users consider it useful.

It was the turn afterwards for what we had been calling the "Agenda of the Superior General." It was a question once more of the Process for the Election of the Superior General. The document, which included all the suggestions received after its first redaction, was delivered in the three official languages, and it was shown also on the screen in three parallel columns. A count was taken by raising hands on the different possible solutions that were presented. Even if it seemed, at first sight, that the topic was already well defined for the 2010 Assembly, the different interventions made it plain that a consensus had not been yet reached.

Finally, a working document was presented to help reflection on this topic for the next General Assembly. The document seemed well structured and it insisted on the idea that the General Assembly is for other things in addition to the business of electing the Superior General. It has to try, as is stated in the Constitutions, to invigorate the spiritual life and the pastoral activity of the whole Congregation. A few additional topics were added which might be of interest for the next General Assembly in line with the ideas exposed by some of the Curia members and other missionaries; in addition, some questions were presented as to how often General Assemblies should be held, their duration and their contents.

There were many other very interesting interventions about the purpose of the Assemblies, and about how we could make them an instrument for revision and for the animation of our life and of our apostolate, which would endow with an added dynamism all our provinces, all the communities, and all the missionaries.

Friday, 15 June: Finally, it was all over

The day was centered on the Eucharist, to be celebrated at five p.m., as the closing act of the meeting. Up to that moment it was time to collect things, formulate conclusions and pack up the luggage not only with one's personal belongings but also with the pills and



the cordials that the Visitors were to take with them to invigorate the life of their provinces. The plenary session opened with the ways of proceeding for the approval of the final redaction of the synthesis prepared by those to whom it had been entrusted, Fathers Ginete and Turati. The latter read the document in Spanish. The truth is that the contents sounded so good that very soon all those present realized that the corrections would be few. We got the impression that we had not wasted our time. We were hearing what we had said, but now very well redacted and in due order. We then went out to read and meditate the document, with the intention of making known to the authors of the synthesis our eventual remarks.

We went back to the hall at 12:30 and Father Daniel P. Borlik, who was the moderator, said that we had some time at our disposal to present some of the points that had been raised in the meeting.

The question of solidarity was raised once more, but this time centered on sharing also the resources of personnel. If the provinces with greater economic means share them with those provinces with fewer resources, then the provinces which do not experience as yet a scarcity of vocations could share them with those that are short of personnel. It was pointed out that it was necessary to recover the missionary spirit of service to the universal Church in a missionary Congregation spread all over the world, thereby avoiding limiting the vision to the narrow confines of one province.

The Superior General asked about the usefulness of these international meetings midway between General Assemblies, particularly if we keep in mind the growing importance of the Visitors' Conferences and other inter-provincial meetings on different topics. But there immediately arose a powerful choral song of praise to the glorious nature of these meetings and to their formative value as regards the consciousness of being a member of an international community, with the additional remark that meeting confreres from all over the world gives the Congregation a concrete human face.

There was still time left for other spontaneous remarks. Once more it was a question of the Process for the Election of the Superior General, the availability for this job and for others in the service of the Congregation, and even the convenience of having or not having a common logo for the whole Congregation that could be easily shown on the lapel. Naturally none of these themes received a definite answer. But really, it was not a question of getting a definite solution for them, but only of making them heard and known in public.

The clock struck the fifth hour when we met for the Eucharist. Since it was the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Superior General spoke to us about God's love which shows itself in the figure of the Good Shepherd as described in the liturgical readings. He reminded the Visitors and the Assistants that it is written in our Constitutions that all those with authority in our communities should incarnate the figure of the Good Shepherd by having mercy towards all. He added an emphasis on the need to work for the problems of justice and peace, making thereby effective merciful love towards the poor.

Such was our thanksgiving to God in our communion in Christ, signified and realized in the Eucharist. It was now the moment to extend our thanksgiving to those who, through their service, had made this Visitors' Meeting possible. We have already mentioned several times the Province of Mexico, which has received us with fraternal solicitude. We should also mention all those who have taken part in the different commissions, represented by the three men shown in the picture at the beginning of this chronicle: the Superior General, the Secretary General and Father Daniel P. Borlik, President of the Preparatory Commission.

The author of these chronicles feels particularly grateful to those who have translated them: Father PASCAL BREMAUD, translator into French, and Fathers JOHN RYBOLT, JOSEPH CUMMINS and JAIME CORERA ANDÍA, who have done the translation into English.

Presentation of the Work Method

by Patrick J. McDevitt, C.M.

The Preparatory Commission for the Visitors' gathering in Mexico has a two-fold objective: (1) To study and reflect on the questions of ongoing formation for Vincentians and (2) to assist the Visitors in acquiring the tools to assess the ongoing formation needs in their provinces and to articulate some direction for possible programs, policies, or information for the Visitors to provide the needed leadership.

To achieve the objectives and address the questions of ongoing formation, the Preparatory Commission has scheduled two days of content presentations and two days of group process. The balance of content and process is helpful for groups to achieve their desired outcome (Kraus & Hulse-Killacky, 1996; Hulse-Killacky, Killacky, & Donigian, 2001; Gladding, 2003). The content component of the gathering provides information and raises questions such as: *What do we have to do? And, what do we need to do to accomplish our goals?* (Gladding, 2003). The process component of the gathering has three parts: (1) it will help Visitors share the collective international wisdom for ongoing formation (2) it will provide a general assessment of ongoing formation (3) it will allow the Visitors to establish some general principles for ongoing formation in the Congregation.

The process component will focus on four areas of interest: (1) *The Diagnostics*: will identify and give language to the ongoing formation needs of confreres; (2) *The Resources*: will target the available resources to address the needs and consider strategies to obtain the resources that are not readily available; (3) *The Interventions*: will look at policies, procedures, curricula, and programs to effectively address the educational and formational needs of confreres; (4) *The Sustainability*: will examine structures and supports that are needed to provide quality, long-term, and sustained formation support for members of the Congregation.

The process component will engage the Visitors in approximately four methodologies: (1) case studies, (2) creating prototypes of ongoing formation programs, (3) work within *Think Tank* groups to brainstorm alternative principles, programs, and structures for ongoing formation, and (4) role-playing to practice the skills of

assessment and address the formation needs and concerns of conferees.

In conclusion, the process component of the gathering will truly be the work of the Visitors and not the work of any presenters, experts, or professionals. The research on groups by Irvin Yalom shows the most effective action-oriented groups are those who set their own course of action. In fact, Yalom's (2005) research shows 5% of group members consider a group leader, teacher, or expert as the most influential for group action. In order for the international Community to set a strong and clear direction for ongoing formation in the Congregation, it is imperative that direction come from the collective experience and learning of the Visitors.

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Formation, a Life Process

“He grew in grace and age and wisdom before God
and all who knew him”

by Hugh O'Donnell, C.M.

I. - FORWARD TO BASICS

Thank you for your invitation to speak about lifelong education and ongoing formation in the Congregation of the Mission. I see it as an invitation to reflect on our common and personal vocation to grow for our whole lives as human beings, disciples of Jesus, followers of Vincent, missionaries, confreres of one another, friends of poor people and friends of priests. I claim no expertise in this area, though formation has been a large part of my life in the Community. I imagine I have been invited because of my present responsibility as Director of the CIF program. Knowing the confreres from around the whole Congregation has been a great blessing for me and I hope that what I have to say will in some way express what I have learned from them of their hopes and aspirations, not to mention their satisfaction with the opportunity to come to CIF. Still, I am not speaking specifically about CIF today, but rather about the call we all have to grow to the end of our lives. Since I am not here as an expert, I have chosen to speak out of my experience and share with you my convictions. I hope I can be concrete and specific, not so you will agree with everything, but so you will have something specific to stimulate your own reflection and evoke your own experience and convictions.

A new generation of leaders for the 21st century. You are a new generation of leaders for the 21st century. I was present at the last General Assembly in 2004, not as a delegate, but to report to the Assembly on CIF. I had a great surprise when I got to the Assembly. Having been a member of the previous five General Assemblies, I expected to know many or most of the members of the 2004 Assembly. But I discovered on my arrival that many of the provincials and most of the delegates were participating in their first Assembly. It was by and large an Assembly of names and faces new to me. After I got over my surprise, I realized that the leadership of the Congregation had passed into new and younger hands, which

made me happy. The Assembly of 2004 being the first General Assembly of the 21st century made me realize we have a new generation of leaders — yourselves — for a new century in the life of the Congregation.

The opportunity of participating in five General Assemblies gave me a perspective on the evolution of the Community over the past 40 years, which I would like to share with you, because I think it gives a context for the work of this gathering. The journey of the Congregation since the Second Vatican Council has been a graced one. Knowing where we are coming from and “what has been going forward” will help put the theme of Lifelong Learning and Ongoing Formation in perspective, and may help to contextualize the way forward.

A graced journey. The first two General Assemblies after the Council, 1968-1969 and 1974, were a time of struggle, conflict, a clash of world views and hopes for the future. It was a time when confreres struggled to know one another and one another's situations, one another's way of thinking, to learn that words prized by one group had a different and often negative meaning for another group. Frankly, it was a time for getting over false impressions, stereotypes, prejudices and projections. There was a shift too in centers of influence. English language dominance in 1968-1969 gave way to Spanish, French and Italian convictions about Jesus the evangelizer (and liberator) of the poor — the agenda prepared by the provinces for the 1974 Assembly was thrown out and the Assembly dedicated itself to pastoral exhortations to the confreres. It was my first Assembly and for me it was marked by mutual misunderstanding as well as serious efforts to overcome the misunderstandings. In hindsight, I believe it was the first phase in becoming an international and global Community, not only geographically, which we already were, but relationally, corporately and as missionaries.

The next phase in our evolution as an international Community with a global mission happened in the 1980 and 1986 Assemblies. For nine weeks in the summer of 1980 the General Assembly worked at writing the new Constitutions and Statutes. There seemed to be a new level of understanding and dialogue, new efforts to communicate and understand one another. The Assembly was stalemated for weeks over whether the Congregation had one end or three ends, but we finally resolved the question in a manner acceptable to the whole Assembly. The image of Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor was embraced as the proper expression of the end of the Community with the clear understanding that it was realized in a threefold way. The final document belonged to a united Assembly and a united Congregation. Six years later the General Assembly of 1986 deepened this bond through its theme, “One Body, One Spirit in Christ.”

The third phase in our post-Conciliar evolution moved us from internal unity to global mission and Vincentian outreach. The Assembly of 1992, in which Father Maloney was elected Superior General, mandated inter-provincial collaboration and a new missionary initiative. The Assembly of 1998 directed the Congregation to reach out also, this time in active collaboration with the incredibly large and increasingly active members of the Vincentian Family.

This journey from conflict and mutual incomprehension (1968-1969 and 1974) to unity and understanding through struggle and dialogue (1980 and 1986) and then on to the expansive missionary outreach of the international missions and engagement with the Vincentian Family (1992 and 1998) was not something anyone planned. It is only seen in retrospect and so, I believe, must be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Naturally, it leads to the question: where do we go from here? Whatever theme will be chosen for the next General Assembly, I do not know, but I presume Lifelong Learning and Ongoing Formation will inevitably be a key component of any future strategic direction you choose.

What is Lifelong Formation all about?

Here are some of the factors that have to enter into any discussion of Lifelong Formation. You may add others.

Growth. Ongoing formation is about a frame of mind and a commitment to grow for the rest of our lives. Initial formation is only an introduction to our way of life and a foundation for what is to come. Years ago initial formation was also final formation, except for a few who went on to specialize in some academic area. But, today ongoing formation is an integral part of our lifelong journey.

Transformation. Formation aims at transformation. This is Rosemary Haughton's insight long ago. The real goal is transformation, which engages the freedom of the individual person responding to the Holy Spirit. Formation provides the context and the material for transformation. We may form people in the limited sense of socializing them into the practices, customs and way of life of the Community. But an authentic formation process aims beyond itself, where in fact it cannot go, that is, into the world of the individual's freedom and the action of the Holy Spirit. It seems to me the grandeur and limitations of formation are found in locating formation as significantly more than socialization and significantly less than transformation.

Journey. Ongoing formation makes a great contribution to the journey from the false self to the true self, from generosity to love, from knowing who we are to giving our lives for the brethren, from poverty in the third person plural (other people are poor) to poverty

in the first person singular (I am the poor one, like Vincent). It fosters the journey from prayers to contemplation, from social conformity to self-authority, and from indirect discourse (repeating what others have said) to direct discourse (speaking the Word of God which has become my own).

Someone comparing the disciples of rabbis with the disciples of Jesus, noted several key differences, among which was that disciples of rabbis hope to eventually be rabbis themselves, whereas disciples of Jesus never graduate. We are lifelong disciples, learners. Our journey is into the ineffable mystery of God's love mediated to us through the *anawim* whom God has made our lot.

Holiness. It has become customary to speak of conversion, not as a single, life-changing event, but as an ongoing reality, ongoing conversion. We are converted not only once, when we respond affirmatively with our whole heart and soul to the invitation of Jesus to come and follow him; after our initial response to the proclamation of the Gospel and the invitation to follow Christ evangelizing the *anawim*, there is the daily invitation to conversion or transformation in Christ. If we speak of conversion or *metanoia* in the Christian world, the East speaks of enlightenment as the goal of this journey.

Competence. Initial formation introduces us to the life and mission of the Community and puts or advances us on the road to holiness. Vows confirm our commitment to evangelizing the poor for the whole of our lives, and priesthood or brotherhood identify our role in evangelization. But this is a point of departure. We will certainly have to grow in ministerial competence and perhaps also develop professional skills and competencies. The new image of priesthood emerging gradually from the Second Vatican Council calls for a whole host of new competencies, especially competencies in proclaiming the Word of God and evangelizing the *anawim*. The primacy of baptism, the emergence of the laity and the development of lay ministries all call for community building skills, listening, collaboration and dynamic leadership. Leaders, they say, are made not born, including clerical and religious leaders.

Being abreast of the times. Pope John XXIII said the Second Vatican Council was about *aggiornamento*, because he sensed the Church had fallen behind the times. I do not know if we have caught up yet or not, but it is incumbent on us to relate to our contemporaries and be in touch with what is happening today. There is no value in being behind the times. Saint Vincent was abreast of his times. I will come back to this later.

A Goal-Oriented Vision. When John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in 1962, he said, "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relationships...." He later explained that it is

an order in which people will resolve their difficulties and differences without violence. Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have both spoken about creating a civilization of love. Here we have a Gospel and ecclesial vision that animates our ongoing formation. When this new order of human relationships and this civilization of love is centered on the least in our society and upon their sacerdotal servants it has a Vincentian face.

I believe the goal of ongoing formation deserves special attention. Thomas Merton has said that we live in a world of perfected means and confused ends. We can know a great deal about process, if we only knew where we were going.

What is the basic dynamic of Ongoing Formation?

1. The basic dynamic of ongoing formation is the same as the dynamic challenge of the Second Vatican Council, namely, 1) "*ressourcement*" and 2) responding to "the signs of the times." We were called to go back to the sources, to the charism of the Founder, and bring it forward into contemporary settings through discerning the signs of the times.

2. "*Ressourcement*." I think the community can congratulate itself on our journey back to the sources since the Second Vatican Council. Coste is available in Italian, Spanish, English, and Polish. Studies, journals, study weeks, workshops, seminars, websites, SIEV and CIF have all contributed to our knowledge of Vincent. The human and historical dimensions of Vincent's vocation and journey to holiness have replaced a hagiographically distant Vincent. We are all delighted with the results. Vincent has come alive for us within the community and the larger Vincentian Family in ways undreamed of. There is, of course, more to do, and we seem ready to do it. Parenthetically, SIEV is seeking to foster a new generation of Vincentian scholars.

3. "The signs of the times." The Constitutions and Statutes of 1980 were our best effort to express the meaning and way of Vincent for our times in the light of Vatican II and what we were learning of Vincent. But, we were immediately conscious that it was the beginning and not the end of our rediscovery of our roots. The second paragraph of the Constitutions, which was overshadowed by all the attention given to the first paragraph on "following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor," points to the future challenge and dynamic of ongoing discernment and conversion. It reads:

2. With this purpose in view, the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the

circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.

More than any other paragraph in the Constitutions, this is our mandate for lifelong discernment and continual renewal. The first two paragraphs establish the fundamental dynamic of our vocation: following Christ evangelizing poor people in contemporary circumstances. It is at the heart of our vocation that we be in touch with our times, in touch with what is happening, what is going forward. But this is not merely about information and the news, it is to be done in faith. Discerning the signs of the times means to regard them with the mind and heart of Christ. "God so loved the world...." Only the love of God which is at the heart of our vocation will keep us from retreating to secure surroundings from the contemporary world, but will give us the sympathy to appreciate the good that is happening and the challenges before us.

Forward to Basics

More than twenty years ago, one of you here was invited by the Midwest province to give us a day of prayer and reflection in preparation for a provincial assembly. I still remember the talk. Our province was divided between confreres who were insisting on going back to basics and confreres who wanted to go ahead to new works. The speaker said that each group was right, but not entirely, perhaps each group was half right. It had a unifying effect on us. Afterwards, I thought the title of his talk could have been: "Forward to Basics." The basics of faith, prayer, love, communion and sacrifice are absolutely necessary, but we will not find them by going back to the 50s or to a world that has passed away. We will only find them as we go forward by engaging the challenges of today and tomorrow and the new world that is being born.

These comments have been a general orientation to ongoing formation. This evening I would like to reflect on the ongoing formation of the individual confrere, and tomorrow on the ongoing formation of the community.

II. - VINCENT'S JOURNEY AND OURS

Going back to the sources has revealed the human side of Vincent's holiness, has shown us the richness and warmth of his relationships, has placed him in relationship to his society and the events of his times, and, in general, has touched our hearts and left

us with a profound appreciation of the real person that Vincent was. I would like to single out three dimensions of the life of Vincent that are relevant to our ongoing formation.

The Way of Vincent

1. Vincent's journey to holiness was gradual. One of the things participants in CIF appreciate most is the discovery of the human side of Vincent. There is great joy in learning about Vincent's road to holiness, that is, in knowing the human and historical dimensions of his journey from financial ambition to becoming the Apostle of Charity. Vincent discovered the goodness of the people in Clichy, his own poverty in his trial of faith, the spiritual poverty of the people on the de Gondi estates in Folleville, the needs of the sick poor in Châtillon, the human goodness of Francis de Sales, the burden of his failed mission to his family and release from it, the synergy of working with partners in mission (Louise, etc.). Vincent's journey to poor people was at the same time a journey to freedom, true evangelical freedom.

2. Vincent found God in history, events circumstances and people. This is what, I believe, definitively separated him from Bérulle. Bérulle's focus was on the heavenly liturgy and he saw the priest as a reflection of that otherworldly holiness. Vincent, on the other hand, found God present in this world: in events, in circumstances, in experience, in people, in the poor. The Jesus of Bérulle was the Risen Lord; the Jesus of Vincent was the earthly Jesus of Nazareth known in the mysteries of his historical existence. For Vincent "God is here!"

André Dodin took delight in saying Vincent did not have a spirituality, but rather he had a Way, a Way that was based on experience. He found God in experience and events; for example, in his encounter with Francis de Sales, or the offer of Marguerite Naseau to aid the Ladies, or the challenge of the Huguenot in Montmirail about the neglect of the poor country people, or the loss of the farm at Orsigny. Dodin identified Vincent's Way in three steps: first, experience, second, reflection in the light of the Gospels and third, action governed by faith and clear criteria. Vincent was not an ideologue, nor did he start from ideas, concepts, dreams and plans. He dealt with events and discerned God's presence in them. This leads us to acknowledge that our world today is different from Vincent's, so that the events he responded to are not the events we experience. God speaks to us in the events of today. We are called to respond with his charism. This makes Vincent's charism perpetually contemporary.

3. Vincent was a man of his times. We like to quote Vincent's words about being inventive to infinity. But the first thing we have to imitate in Vincent is being abreast of our times. Vincent was abreast of his times. There was very little that happened in France that Vincent didn't know about (or respond to).

Because Vincent was a man of his times, we are invited to be men of our times. Because Vincent found God in history, in events, and in people (rather than in theories and ideologies) Vincent's Way is enduringly relevant. His times are not our times, but fidelity to his way means for us relevance to our times — to be men of our times. And this is what we undertook in writing the Constitutions and Statutes in 1980.

We know that Pope John XXIII believed that the church had fallen behind the times and needed to come up to date. That is the meaning of "*aggiornamento*." Some people say that the "*aggiornamento*" phase is finished and that we are in a new phase, called "re-founding" or "re-inventing." Perhaps without knowing it, that is what we did in writing the Constitutions in 1980. We re-defined ourselves and what it means to be Vincentian for the present and the future.

The Constitutions have a future thrust. Yesterday I quoted the remarkable second paragraph of the Constitutions. This is the charter for ongoing formation in relationship to the realities of our society and culture and the events of our times. It is one of the two pillars of the Constitutions. It calls for:

- Attention to the signs of the times
- Attention to the more urgent calls of the Church
- Opening up new ways
- Using new means
- Adapted to the circumstances of time and place
- Evaluating and planning works and ministries
- In this way remaining in a state of continuous renewal.

This paragraph links us to what is going forward and sets a framework for growth, development and conversion for the community and for the individual. It is in continuity with paragraph 77 which states:

1. *Our formation, in a continuous process, should have as its purpose that the members, animated by the spirit of St. Vincent, become suitable to carry on the mission of the Congregation.*
2. *They should therefore grow daily in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the center of our life and the rule of the congregation.*

In the same vein paragraph 81 says:

The formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life.

This insistence on lifelong formation and continuous growth in relation to contemporary needs and events is new.

In 1980, we re-invented ourselves. It was a long time before I understood the Constitutions and Statutes of 1980 as a re-invention of ourselves, but that is what they are. The difference between the 326 years (1658-1984) when we followed the Common Rules and the present Constitutions is that Saint Vincent wrote the Common Rules and we have written the Constitutions and Statutes. There is a second difference also. The Common Rules were based on experience and reflected the actual life of the Congregation. The Constitutions and Statutes express our aspirations for the future, what we believe we are called to be. The consequence of this, which is a third difference, is that we are called not only to fidelity to what already is, but we are called to fidelity to the future, which some have called "creative fidelity."

1. We authored the Constitutions and Statutes. This implies responsibility. Implicitly we accepted responsibility for defining the shape and thrust of Vincentian life in this new era. Vatican Council II directed us to do it, and the Holy See approved and confirmed our Constitutions, this is true. Still, the responsibility for living the charism of Vincent in our time is ours. And, as we do, we are discovering a richness and depth in the Constitutions beyond what we thought we put there. This is certainly the experience of confreres who come to CIF and the experts as well.

2. They bear upon the present and the future. Although Vincent said that the Common Rules contained nothing that the community was not already living, we cannot say the same thing about the Constitutions and Statutes. They express, not necessarily our way of life today, but rather values, goals and norms that we believe embody the charism of Vincent and that we seek to measure up to in new circumstances.

3. They call for "creative fidelity." Our fidelity is not only to what is already given in the past, but it is also to the future, that is, to "opening up new ways and new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place" (C. 2). Our challenge is to "creative fidelity."

It is very common to quote Vincent's words, "God is creative to infinity." The Constitutions and Statutes are our means of imitating the creative side of Vincent's charism.

III. - CHOOSING LIFE: RESOURCES FOR MOVING FORWARD

- A. Appreciation of where we have been and the good that is happening**
 - 1. Acceptance of our mission: "following Christ evangelizing poor people"
 - 2. The feeling and experience of belonging to an international community
 - 3. A tangible sense of the unity of the Congregation worldwide
 - 4. The goodwill and goodness of the confreres
 - 5. The inculturation of the Gospel on all continents
 - 6. Indigenous leadership throughout the Congregation
- B. The recognition that the confreres are the greatest asset of the Congregation**
 - 1. Jesus says of the disciples, "I thank you for those you have given to me... they are your gift to me"
 - 2. Each confrere, as well as each poor person, is God's gift
- C. An appreciation of the potential benefits of ongoing formation**
 - 1. The confidence that we are in touch with our times
 - 2. The sense of relevance to our society and our people
 - 3. The joy of being life-long learners — "Abide in my truth!"
 - 4. A deepening Vincentian identity and the desire to share it
 - 5. The reality of being men of prayer who are at home with interiority
 - 6. Confidence and trust that the Lord is leading us in our present circumstances
 - 7. Generativity — the release of personal and corporate energy in the service of the poor and the clergy
- D. A positive attitude toward change and conversion (humility)**
 - 1. Authenticity calls for ongoing conversion
 - 2. Conversion is spiritual, moral, intellectual, affective, social and political
 - 3. Conversion is from the false self to the true self, from self-interest to self-sacrifice, from ego to authenticity and freedom

E. The cooperation and goodwill of the confreres

1. Recognition of the confreres and their abilities
2. A positive program of growth and development
3. A community culture of affirmation and encouragement
4. Ultimately the self-gift of the confreres

F. The large number of people of good will with whom we might collaborate

1. In the Vincentian Family and our Vincentian works
2. In the world — networking and collaboration

IV. - KEYS TO THE FUTURE

A. Forward to Basics

1. Continue studying Vincent and appropriating his charism
2. Be men of prayer and interiority
 - the relationship of prayer and poverty
 - Giuseppe Toscani, *La Mystique des Pauvres. Le charism de la Charité* (Saint Paul, 1998). Also, translated by Myles Rearden, *The Spirituality of the Poor* (privately published, 2006)
3. Self-sacrifice and unconditional commitment
 - Listening with an open heart
 - Poverty of time
4. Fraternal communion under contemporary conditions
5. Rejoice in being the “Little Company” (abandon the “gleaners” mentality)

B. Basic choices

1. Start from our own experience
2. Honor the good will and experience of the confreres
3. Choose to lead (setting the agenda and real expectations)
4. Challenge the confreres, communities and provinces to grow
5. Educate for the challenges of our time
6. Use available resources within and outside the community
7. Create learning experiences that lead to behavioral change
8. Evangelize the culture of the Congregation — starting with ongoing formation

- Ongoing formation is a way of evangelizing the community, ourselves
- Individually and corporately

C. Identify the strategic challenges to the community in the world

1. Poor people on our doorsteps; the growing gap between rich and poor
2. The prevalence of war and violence and the longing for peace and reconciliation; Saint Vincent, a man of peace in a time of war
3. The hunger for meaning, values, faith and prayer
4. The need of priests for support, welcome and friendship (Imagine new ways of being brothers to priests — houses of hospitality?)
5. The longing of lay people to volunteer and to serve

Synthesis of the Theme of Ongoing Formation

(Mexico City, 4-15 June 2007)

by Manuel Ginete Futalan, C.M.
and Giuseppe Turati, C.M.

INTRODUCTION

From 4-15 June 2007 the international meeting of all the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission was held in Mexico City.

The first week centered on the theme of ongoing formation. Hugh O'Donnell CM led the reflection for the first four days, offering us very valuable material on the theme based on his profound knowledge of the Congregation's journey in these last decades. Patrick McDevitt CM, aided by his assistant, María José Pacheco, facilitated the reflection and the interchange both in the plenary sessions and in the work groups.

Daniel Vásquez CM, Visitor of the Province of Colombia, ended the week with a half day of spiritual retreat, and led the Visitors in a meditation on ongoing formation centering on the two poles of the Vincentian vocation: Jesus Christ and the poor.

BASIC ASPECTS OF VINCENTIAN FORMATION

The meeting led the participants to deepen the different aspects of ongoing formation, individualizing the fundamental perspectives, the basic dynamic principles, the objectives to be reached, the operative levels, aptitudes and resources, and the obstacles (cf. C. 1; 25, 2°; 81).

Fundamental perspectives for ongoing Vincentian formation

The *following of Christ*, Evangelizer of the Poor, constitutes the principal axis of all Vincentian formation. Christ and the poor are the essential and indispensable poles and the source of ongoing formation: it is necessary to love Jesus Christ ever more in order to love the poor ever more, just as one needs to love the poor ever more in order to love Jesus Christ ever more.

The *identity* of the Vincentian missionary is not given once and for all; rather it is the result of his daily relationship with Christ, with the community to which he belongs, with the world and with the poor.

We are convinced that formation is not an acquired state, but rather a *way*: initial formation is only an introduction to this way which lasts all life long. This way renews itself in a process which, from day by day, leads to a profound transformation of the personal identity of the missionary, in order to configure him ever more with Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor (cf., C 77-78).

Fraternal life in community is the dynamic ground in which the relationships with Christ and the poor are nourished, sustained and verified.

Basic dynamic principles of Vincentian Formation

The *Christological* principle: it is not enough to imitate Christ; it is necessary to enter into his mystery in order to conform ourselves to Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor, and to participate in the life of the Trinity.

The principle of *Vincentian experience*: we are to discern in the daily events of our life the will of God and to respond to it with action.

The *mystical* principle: openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, which shapes our person in an open, available and joyful way.

The principle of *Vincentian humanism*: formation consists in becoming ever more a "humanized" person in all its dimensions (human, intellectual, spiritual, communitarian, apostolic), permeated with the Vincentian dimension which gives them form and dynamism (cf. C 9).

The *community* principle: the community is the formative agent par excellence, the school of ongoing formation.

The *relational* principle: whether in the contact with the poor person or in the ability to relate with others in a flexible, cordial and mature way.

The principle of *Christian realism*: having the capacity to relate to reality, recognizing it as showing God's providential design for our life.

The principle of *unity in diversity*.

The principle of *progressive evolution* of the various stages of maturity.

The objectives to be reached

The first objective of ongoing formation is the *holiness* corresponding to the life of the missionary: a holiness acquired through daily interior conversion and transformation, which leads to "putting on the spirit of Christ" (CR I, 3; C 1).

Joined to this fundamental objective is that of *continual growth on the human and professional level*, which leads the missionary to acquire an ever-deeper capacity for relating with others and competence in the proclamation of the Word and in the practice of charity.

The Vincentian missionary is therefore called to *be always in tune with the times* and to allow himself to be intimately touched by what goes on around him, knowing how to discern in daily events the mission to which God calls him.

This leads him, in fidelity to the gospel, to adapt his own ministry to the real demands of the people, learning to be *flexible and creative in his apostolate*. Such apostolic creativity will be mature and efficacious the more it is lived in the sphere of a fraternity which frees one from individualism and loneliness in the ministry.

The operative levels (these should not be read in chronological succession, but rather in a circular relationship)

At the *personal* level, the missionary takes responsibility for his ongoing formation; it cannot be delegated to or substituted by another person or strategy.

At the *local* level, the community constitutes the primary area of formation in which each confrere is constantly challenged to grow.

At the *provincial* level, the Visitor is called to create, where it does not exist, the commission for ongoing formation and to empower it in order to assist in developing in all confreres the personal motivation and conviction of the importance of ongoing formation (cf., S 41-42).

At the level of *Conferences of Visitors and Provinces*, formative meetings, interchanges and evaluations are indispensable today.

At the level of the *Congregation*, there is a need to develop some lines of specifically Vincentian ongoing formation (a *Ratio Formationis* or *Lines of Action*) that outline the general framework in which the other levels (CIF, SIEV, Vincentian Months, etc.) operate.

Aptitudes and Resources

The responsibility in formation at the various levels is nourished by a profound and enduring aptitude for reading *the signs of the times* which constitute a constant stimulus for personal and communal growth. The discernment of such signs requires a continual *comparison with the sources* of our spirituality (writings of Saint Vincent, Constitutions and Statutes, Vincentian tradition, etc.).

Our present context, too, offers important resources, among which is the desire of many laity to participate in the Vincentian mission and to commit themselves to it. The *Vincentian Family* can be an important resource today for the enrichment of our Vincentian spirituality and a fruitful collaboration in the service of the poor.

Finally, the broader social context in which we live is an important resource: we can enhance the value of the *widespread need for sense and values in today's world* and contribute to creating in it a culture of solidarity and a "civilization of love" (Paul VI).

The obstacles

In the journey of formation, the missionary encounters throughout his life many obstacles, beginning with those which manifest themselves on the level of the *person*, like the weakening of the spiritual dimension, apostolic pragmatism which does not allow space for a constant and attentive reflection on the signs of the times, individualism in the ministries which indulges the desire for personal fulfillment.

On the *community* level the major obstacles assume the form of a shift to bourgeois values and lifestyle, the lack of formation projects and concrete operative plans, the difficulty in relating to one another in a mature way and the distance from the poor which makes the knowledge of their reality proportionately difficult.

Finally, at the *cultural* level, the principal obstacles to ongoing formation include aspects of consumerism, fundamentalism, relativism, weakening of the truth, etc. All this is in contrast to living, seeking and witnessing to the truth with simplicity and humility which constitute the first steps in the following of Christ.

PROCESS OF DRAFTING A POSSIBLE FORMATION PLAN

Should the process of drawing up a possible formation plan proceed from the bottom up, vice versa or in parallel?

It must happen in a parallel way because, from the top, we receive the light which unites and inspires us in the same spirit and nature of the Congregation by way of its spirituality, its Constitutions

and Statutes. From the bottom, the base incarnates the essence of the Vincentian spirit in a concrete context that, in its turn, enriches and renews the being of the Congregation in time.

The problem of balance between general lines of formation and the demands at the regional and provincial levels

It is necessary to focus on the foundation and essence of the Congregation: "To follow Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor." We must allow for both the unity of the Congregation along general, though not uniform, lines and the creativity and richness of plurality, respecting the diversity that enriches and strengthens us.

The problem of balance in responsibility among the individual confrere, the Visitor, and the community

The missionary is the object of the formation. That is why the Visitor, in order to maintain the balance between the individual and the community, must enhance the value and promote the qualities and abilities of the missionary, stimulating and encouraging the means which permit the development of his capacities in order to put them at the service of the mission of the local community and of the province.

The problem of balance between initial formation and ongoing formation (continuity and differences)

The fundamental principles and orientations of our vocation are the same; thus, continuity exists between initial and ongoing formation. With initial formation, the candidate is offered some tools that will allow him to respond to the challenges of his time and to incarnate the charism in a specific place. Ongoing formation, as it returns to the sources that nourish it, revising and updating the tools received in initial formation, keeps the Vincentian charism alive, deepens it, perfects it, and re-interprets it in the face of new challenges.

What models should be our point of departure and where do we want to arrive?

We move from the Christ of Saint Vincent in order to arrive at perfection and human maturity in the service of the poor.

What criteria should be our inspiration, bearing in mind what is already contained in our Constitutions?

They are: the signs of the times, the Sacred Scripture, the tradition of the Church and of the Congregation, the Constitutions and Statutes, and the other documents of the Congregation.

How can we motivate confreres to ongoing formation both on the personal level and on the professional and provincial level?

We seek creative ways to motivate them: starting from their difficult experiences with ongoing formation; organizing meetings especially in new places, asking the local communities to discuss questions and to return the results of the discussion to the Visitor or the person in charge of ongoing formation.

Other creative ways: internet, email, interactive means (for example, the online study of the Constitutions, CD), discussion groups, testimonies of persons with experience, etc.

POSSIBLE PROCEDURES

Many thought it desirable that the Superior General write a *Letter* in which he synthesizes what emerged from the Visitors' Meeting on the theme of ongoing formation and animates the confreres to follow up on this objective, while recognizing the value of previous efforts on it in various provinces.

Parts of this letter could be:

- an introduction on the meeting that was held in Mexico,
- an encouragement to continue that which is already being done (*human-spiritual dimension*),
- consequences of the lack of ongoing formation (*intellectual-Vincentian dimension*),
- benefits of formation for the improvement of the mission (*apostolic dimension*), and
- whatever else responds to the vision or to the criteria of the Superior General himself, etc.

Many found it useful to create a commission in order to deepen this topic and draft a document. Such a commission should use the inductive method in its reflection, starting from concrete reality. The commission's work also will need to have practical and concrete application.

The possible *Ratio Formationis Vincentiana* could be the fruit of this process, which could take into account the results from the survey conducted by the Preparatory Commission for the Mexico

Visitors' Meeting, as well as the already existing *Ratios* for initial formation (Major Seminary and Internal Seminary). The character of the final document could be decided by the next General Assembly (2010). It is proposed, however, that the document have a narrative literary style and that it keep present a double vision: from one side, ongoing formation; from the other, the mission.

Others were of the opinion that, instead of a *Ratio* or in addition to it, it is desirable to develop a *Practical Guide*, this also being produced by a commission. It should be a simple and practical tool, clear and concise, like an outline to which each province can then give its own form and which little by little takes on consistency through feedback and evaluation from provinces and Visitors' Conferences.

Such a *Guide* could offer to local communities and to provinces a tool for planning and developing their own ongoing formation closely tied to daily life, and thus with an efficacious motivational thrust. In addition, it could suggest to each confrere theoretical reasons for his personal responsibility toward ongoing formation, as well as practical and concrete methods, arguments, and lines of action.

This outline of a *Practical Guide* should take into consideration the fundamental aspects of Vincentian formation as they were presented and discussed at the Visitors' Meeting and also concrete ways of carrying out ongoing formation in the various provinces.

FINAL COMMENTS

At the conclusion of the meeting, it was pointed out that there was a lack of sharing of the experiences that many provinces have.

However, the meeting helped the participants to clarify what ongoing formation is: it is much more than simply professional or intellectual formation, which, while also necessary is not the most important.

We are convinced of the need for self-reflection and of developing self-formation starting from the existing *Ratio*.

The individual objectives, while they must be flexible and adapted to the people, need to be at the same time rooted in and faithful to the Gospel.

“Sharing the Mission”

A Report on the Vincentian Family

(January 2005 – June 2007)

by Manuel Ginete Futralan, C.M.

Delegate for the Vincentian Family

INTRODUCTION

I shall proceed in three steps. First, I shall briefly situate us within the basic framework of our relationship and ministry in the Vincentian Family. Second, I shall indicate what has happened in the Vincentian Family, at least on the international level, since 2005. And finally, I shall present the challenges ahead and the programs planned.

1. FRAMEWORK OF OUR RELATIONSHIP AND MINISTRY IN THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

1.1. *In our Constitutions and Recent Documents*

Our relationship and ministry in the Vincentian Family is fundamentally rooted in St. Vincent's insight that we all share in the mission of Christ (and the Church) to evangelize the poor, and that we can do much more for the poor when we work together. Our Constitutions (1980) make a reference to this in article 1,3^o: “The members... help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor.”¹ More specifically, Statute 7 § 1 states that “lay associations founded by St. Vincent and those which are inspired by his spirit should be of special concern to our members, since they have the right to our presence and to our support.”

¹ Constitutions 17 says something specific about our relationship with the Daughters of Charity: “*Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share the same heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together.*”

The 38th General Assembly (1992) clearly stated that "we are not alone in our vocation, rather we belong to a large Vincentian Family...."² And precisely who belongs to this Vincentian Family is defined by the 39th General Assembly (1998) thus:

*"The expression 'Vincentian Family,' [...] should not be understood in a juridical-canonical sense, but as a pastoral term. By (it) we refer to the networking of congregations, organizations, movements, groups and persons which, directly or indirectly, extend through time the Vincentian charism. The branches of this network were either founded directly by Saint Vincent de Paul or regard him as their source of inspiration and dedication to the service of the poor. The Congregation of the Mission considers itself as part of this family."*³

This same Assembly saw the challenges facing the Congregation in the new millennium, reiterated its convictions and formulated commitments all in the context of its relationship with the broader Vincentian Family. Six years later, the 40th General Assembly (2004) took up the same objectives, giving particular attention to formation in Vincentian spirituality and the collaborative work with the poor.⁴

I bring up these matters in order to underscore several points. One, that the commitment to the Vincentian Family has become integral to the Congregation's ministry. The *Practical Guide for the Visitor* (1998, 2005) spells this out especially when it enjoins the Visitor to make sure not only that confreres are prepared for this ministry but also help establish the various Vincentian groups.⁵ Two, the focal point of our coming together as Family is the charism we all share and receive from St. Vincent de Paul, the love and service of the poor. These two points determine, in my opinion, the nature of our relationship with the rest of the Family branches. On the one hand, we are given the responsibility to promote the charism in these and other groups — thus an active leadership role in it. On the other hand, we are to regard ourselves as one group among many who are co-sharers of the charism. From the viewpoint of the Constitutions and the Assemblies, we are not the sole, let alone primary or

² Letter to the Confreres, 38th General Assembly 1992, *Vincentiana* 36 (1992) 364.

³ Footnote number 2 in the Final Document, 39th General Assembly (1998), in *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 386. In her study, Sr. Betty Ann McNeil lists 305 associations or groups from 1617 to 2006 that may be said to be part of the Vincentian Family. There are still others that need future verification. See, BETTY ANN MCNEIL, *Vincentian Family Tree*, Chicago, 2006.

⁴ Final Documents, 40th General Assembly (2004) in *Vincentiana* 48 (2004) 355-364.

⁵ *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, numbers 384-389.

superior, guardians of the charism. It is good to remind ourselves of these points especially because, in my opinion, the effectiveness of our ministry towards the other groups in the Vincentian Family will largely hinge on the balance we strike between the two sides of this responsibility.

1.2. In Our Experience Today

Working with others in our Family, particularly with the Daughters of Charity, has been in fact part of our history. Through the years the nature of this relationship swung from an almost total dependence on the Directors (meaning, our confreres) to relative autonomy between the two Congregations directly founded by Vincent de Paul, and between these two and the AIC or Confraternities of Charity. This was in no small way influenced by the specific relationship of our Superior General to these other two groups. As St. Vincent's successor, he provides the strongest link to the heritage and person of our common Founder. It is also in this capacity that many branches look to the Superior General for inspiration, leadership and guidance.

1.2.1. The Superior General and the Rest of the Vincentian Family

As you all know, the Superior General has specific canonical responsibilities towards the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, being Superior General (that is, ultimate religious Superior) of both Congregations. At the same time, as per their respective Statutes, the Superior General is Director General of the Vincentian Marian Youth (JMV), of the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM), and of the Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI).⁶ In his capacity as Superior General and/or Director General, he appoints confreres (and even sisters) as National Directors or Directresses of these various organizations. In relation to the other branches within the Vincentian Family, the role of the Superior General is more of a moral or spiritual leader from whom they expect some guidance and animation in the Vincentian charism.

⁶ Helping him as his Assistant Directors in these groups are the DC Director General (Javier Álvarez), the JMV Assistant Director General (Pedro Castillo), the AMM International Coordinator (Benjamín Romo), and his delegate to the MISEVI International Coordinating Council (Felipe Nieto). At the same time, there are other confreres who, in a way, are his personal representatives to the AIC as Ecclesiastical Assistant (Manuel Ginete) and to the SSVP as Assistant International Spiritual Director (Teodoro Barquín).

His responsibilities towards the Vincentian Family at large cover the following areas: animation, organization, coordination, communication and formation. It is in the context of these responsibilities that the office of the Delegate for the Vincentian Family has to be construed.

1.2.2. Office of the Delegate of the Vincentian Family

In 1998, the Superior General created the office of the Delegate of the Vincentian Family precisely to assist him, particularly on the international level, in undertaking these responsibilities. These have become more and more urgent, given an increasingly interconnected world summoning collaborative responses to diverse situations of poverty. The first Delegate, Benjamín Romo, operated almost single-handedly for the first six years as he organized the office, assisted the different branches in establishing norms and statutes, coordinated various projects, etc. Since 2005, when I took over, we have tried to continue these activities. This time, however, we are fortunate to count on Sister María Pilar López, a Daughter of Charity as Secretary, and Alfredo Becerra, erstwhile editor of *Vincentiana* and responsible for *Nuntia* as assistant in matters of publication and communication.

In relation to the Vincentian Family internationally as a whole and to various groups therein, the Office of the Delegate has formulated a plan and focused its attention on the following objectives:

- Establish and/or strengthen Vincentian Family National Coordinating Councils
- Assist in the formation of advisors and directors
- Seek out others who share our Vincentian heritage
- Share the charism with the young people, and
- Establish links with other international organizations (not necessarily religious).

2. WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE 2005

In the past two years and a half, the following activities and events have taken place.

2.1. Animation Visits

In his visits to the different countries, aside from meeting with the confreres and the Daughters of Charity the Superior General also took time to meet with the different members of the Vincentian

Family. Since 2005, he has practically covered the 6 continents: Latin America (7 countries); Africa (8); Asia (4); Europe (9+); USA; Oceania (3).

For my part, as per the suggestion from the former Delegate, I concentrated on visiting and animating those countries that have not been previously visited. Thus in 2005, I went to Indonesia (April), Tanzania (September), Ethiopia (September). In 2006, I visited Nigeria (April), Thailand (May), Cambodia (May), Ireland (June), and Ukraine (September). In these countries one notices a great enthusiasm for our charism and a strong desire to become better formed in its spirituality.

2.2. Organization and Coordination

In line with the priorities we set for the Vincentian Family in these coming years, one important objective of my visits to countries with a relatively recent group of the Vincentian Family was to organize the national Vincentian Family coordinating councils. It is felt that the effectiveness of our services towards the poor depends on the structures of coordination and collaboration that are set up on the level of the country. In some areas like Brazil and several other countries in Latin America, these national coordinating councils have existed for some time now, and some of them even have formulated some form of internal regulation or guidelines to facilitate coordination among the various branches of the Family. A principal reason for visiting Brazil in March 2006 was precisely to learn from their coordinating council and thus be able to share this knowledge with other countries. Since then I have received "Internal Regulations" of the Vincentian Family in Mexico, Central America, Egypt, etc.

Another very important instrument of organization and coordination on the international level is the annual meeting of the Vincentian Family International Heads, held either in Rome or in Paris in January or early February. As you well know, this meeting usually sends out the yearly letter from the International Heads, with suggestions on the theme for the celebration of St. Vincent's feast, as well as on possible projects that could be undertaken by the Vincentian Family on the local level. In the last three years, these have been the suggested themes:

2005: United as the Vincentian Family in solidarity with the most vulnerable

2006: Love is infinitely inventive

2007: What we have heard and seen and touched with our hands — we announce to you (on systemic change).

2.3. Assemblies and Meetings

A very useful means of organizing and coordinating efforts in the Vincentian Family has been international assemblies and meetings. Since 2005, various branches and national groups held important meetings, in which at least one of us from the Vincentian Family Office participated. The following are noteworthy.

2005: AIC (Santo Domingo), SSVP (Salamanca), JMV (Paris), Vincentian Youth Gathering (Cologne), AMM (Rome), MISEVI (Berceau)

2006: February (Latin America), April (AIC Asia, Manila)

2007: March (Rome, AIC International Assembly), April (MEGVIS), May (San Francisco, California, VF USA).

Aside from these meetings, several of these branches hold, annually or twice a year, meetings of their respective international coordinating groups. This is true especially for AIC, JMV, AMM, and MISEVI. The Director General is usually present at these, and occasionally the Delegate too attends.

2.4. Information, Communication and Linkage with Other Groups in the VF

In some of the countries I visited there exist books on the Vincentian Family complete with descriptions of the branches found in the country. On the international level, we are fortunate to have several publications: the revised edition of Sr. Betty Ann McNeil's book on the Vincentian Family Tree (2006) which updated the groups inspired by Vincent's charism; the revised "dossier" or booklet on the Vincentian Family (2006) published in *Vincentiana* in English, French and Spanish; and a model of a triptych on the VF which has been translated and adapted in several countries, and many other books in various languages.

In addition, the Vincentian Family websites, in various languages, have been maintained and they continue to furnish us with updated information on the Vincentian Family. Normally, this is the quickest reference on the history, branches, projects, recent news, etc. of the Vincentian Family.

2.5. Formation

Most of the visits would include formation sessions for members of the various Vincentian Family branches. Generally, I have been asked to speak about the worldwide situation, the challenges facing our Family, the spirituality that inspires us, as well as the projects that have been undertaken on behalf of the poor. In some instances,

I spoke on a particular theme suited to the event, as in Brazil ("On the most vulnerable," March 2006); Valencia, Spain ("The transmission of faith in the Vincentian Family," July 2006); Nicaragua ("With Jesus and Mary we encounter the poor," October 2006); Madrid ("Sharing the Mission," March 2007). Every year I also speak about the Vincentian Family at the CIF sessions in Paris.

In this work of formation, Sister María Pilar López serves not only as Secretary but also as a resource person. Since her arrival she has been invited to give conferences on various themes in Bogotá (Colombia); Caracas (Venezuela), and Rome (AIC International Assembly).⁷

Formation materials on the level of each branch as well as on the international level of the Vincentian Family have been published (e.g. VMY, AMM, and AIC) and can be accessed through the internet. In Latin America formations sessions for the members of the Family at large are regularly held in some schools of Vincentian spirituality. In Asia, an attempt is being made to open to other members of the VF in the local area some formation sessions originally planned for CM formators.

3. CHALLENGES AHEAD AND PROJECTS PLANNED

The above-mentioned activities and programs give us great hope for the future of the Vincentian Family throughout the world. Still, there are a number of things to which we need to pay sufficient attention, if we are to ensure the transmission of St. Vincent's charism to future generations, and thus be able to sustain our services towards the poor. I mention some of these.

3.1. Formation of National Coordinating Councils

As I said earlier, these councils on the level of the country are crucial since they would serve as the coordinating group for the Family in a given country. It is important that the leaders of the various branches of the local Vincentian Family take this to heart. Otherwise, every branch will go on with its individual programs and the potential for greater, more lasting and better organized projects for the poor would be left unexplored.

⁷ Bogotá: "The spiritual dynamic of solidarity with the most vulnerable" ("Dinamismo espiritual de la solidaridad con los más vulnerables"); Caracas: "The profile of the agent of Vincentian Youth Ministry" ("Perfil del agente de pastoral Juvenil Vincentina"), and Rome: "The roots of St. Vincent's spirituality inspire our ways of responding to poverties" ("Las raíces de la espiritualidad de San Vicente inspiran nuestros caminos para responder a las pobreza").

As a loose network of otherwise autonomous congregations, groups, institutes, and associations, the Vincentian Family on the local level counts principally on the willingness, leadership, and persistence of the group's respective leaders, particularly on the part of the CM, if it is to establish and promote meetings, formation sessions and collaborative projects.

3.2. Animation of and reaching out to other groups in the wider VF or those countries that have yet to be visited

It is a source of joy and inspiration to hear many groups desiring to know more about the deep origins of their communities within the charism of St. Vincent de Paul. We need to reach out to them inasmuch as they long to become part of the bigger Family. This has the advantage of favoring our programs with the poor, as well as deepening our own spirituality.

3.3. Adoption of common projects to show solidarity among VF members

Meetings and international assemblies are important symbolic events that truly inspire people in our Family. But still the most inspiring moment to people outside of the Vincentian Family, and who may perhaps be working for the poor, is when they see groups of men and women, clerics, sisters and lay, Catholics and non-Catholics, working together on a project, united solely in the example and method of the great apostle of charity, Vincent de Paul. In some countries, the Vincentian Family has become a trusted assistant and conduit of funds from foundations and even governmental institutions.

3.4. Formation of advisors and leaders

The most common request that I receive is for a trusted member of the Vincentian Family who could assist in the formation in Vincentian spirituality. There is a dearth of good formators in this matter and I believe there will never be a time when we would have enough formators. There is especially a need to form lay advisors and directors who could provide the service of formation to their fellow lay Vincentians. We need to remember that the overwhelming majority of the Vincentian Family is lay. We can learn a great deal from Vincent's confidence in the capabilities of lay people, especially women. Formation in lay spirituality and in the missionary dimension of our charism should be a priority program in the Vincentian Family.

In connection with this, I wish to let you know that we are in the process of organizing formation sessions for advisors of the VF. The last international session of this nature was held in 2002 and it is about the right time to hold another one. This time however, we believe it would be more helpful to hold them by regions — thus, on the five continents. More details on this will be communicated later. If you have any suggestions in this regard, please let me know.

3.5. *Work with youth*

It is decisive that we attract youth to our mission with the poor. There is every reason to believe that they are just waiting to be inspired and recruited to this kind of involvement. From our own experience, we know that many will respond to the challenge positively. Yet, in order to be successful in this, we need to look at our own methods and processes in recruiting, inviting, and supporting them in this endeavor. We need to re-examine those ways that worked or did not work, and to take on new ways in order to involve them with the poor.

An important assembly is being planned in connection with the World Youth Day to be held in Australia. Members of the Vincentian Family in that country are organizing a Vincentian Youth Gathering in Sydney during the week prior to the WYD week itself. This needs our support and encouragement, as well as the participation of those among us who work with youth.

3.6. *Support for systemic change project*

The theme that is being proposed by the International Heads of the Vincentian Family is that of systemic change. More information about this is forthcoming. In the last meeting of the VF International Presidents and Superiors, it was deemed an important enough theme to suggest it for the next two to three years. This also needs our support and collaboration.

3.7. *Balance between leadership-animation and respect for autonomy*

Finally, the hardest of the challenges in my opinion is one that continually confronts us; that is, how to maintain a balance between leadership and animation on the one hand and careful respect for each Vincentian Family group's autonomy on the other hand. These in fact expect a great deal from us in terms of leadership, but at the same time there is the desire to be treated as partners in the charism. As you well know, this has important ramifications on different

levels, among them, economic and cultural levels. Perhaps an ideal which we could aim at would be extensive collaboration with one another, yet maintaining the distinct identity and peculiar character of each branch.

CONCLUSION

I trust the above has given you a view on what is happening in the Vincentian Family especially from the vantage point of the Office of the Delegate. I wish to end with a reminder from our General Assembly of 2004. After taking note of the impact the changes in Church and society have made on our Vincentian identity, it concludes thus:

"All this means that we must work to share our common spirit with the other branches of the Vincentian Family, and together to heed the call to an ongoing conversion through which we become evermore deeply involved in the world and in the lot of the poor" (Final Document, II, 2).

Mexico City, 8 June 2007

Homily Closing Eucharist, Visitors' Meeting

Friday, 15 June 2007, Mexico

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11-16; Romans 5:5b-11; Luke 15:3-7

On this Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I think it is most appropriate that we concentrate on the meaning of the heart, not only the heart of Jesus, but our own hearts. It might seem an obvious statement, but for us, that is, those of us who are men, for the most part we deal with issues more from the perspective of the head, rather than the heart. Perhaps much of what we have done this week has been head-work. It is obvious that they do not need to be in opposition, that is, the head and the heart, but in collaboration, one with another. Our challenge is to allow what is in our head to filter through our hearts.

Having said that, let's move on to the heart of the matter. As we heard in the opening prayer, when we focus on the heart of Jesus, we are focusing on the Father's gift of love, not only to Jesus, but to ourselves. God the Father's love comes from the heart of Jesus. We are called to receive that love in our hearts and, in turn, share that love with others. The heart is the symbol of love's triumph.

Although the Solemnity is called the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it is interesting that the Word of God, which the Universal Church presents to us, focuses on the image of the Good Shepherd. The relationship between the two is obviously the compassion of the Good Shepherd for his sheep. He seeks out those who are scattered. Those lost are brought back by his mercy. He heals their wounds, gives strength to the weak and nourishes them with justice.

Our Constitutions, particularly 97, which has been cited in this meeting on a number of occasions, invites us, who exercise authority, to have always before our eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered to, but to minister. The Constitution reminds us to be conscious of our responsibility before God, considering ourselves servants of the Community for furthering the spirit of Saint Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life.

As Visitors, you are called to seek the lost, to bring back the strayed, to bind up the injured, to give strength to the weak and to

nourish those members of your province with justice. My Assistants and I are called to do the same in communion with you in and through the services we provide for strengthening the true communion of apostolate and life among the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

Our attitudes toward those under our charge should be, first and foremost, the attitudes of the Good Shepherd, filled with that compassion, which flows from the heart of Jesus. This primary way of dealing with others places the emphasis on love. We have to believe that true love for others, especially those under our care, is the best way to solve whatever difficulties or challenges we might face. That is why we confirm that the heart is the symbol of love's triumph over all that speaks of evil, speaks of sin, speaks of woundedness, division and hurt. The love of Christ's heart brings healing and peace.

Our role as good shepherds, as men filled with compassion, is directed primarily to those under our care, the members of our different provinces. We are called to encourage them, as well, to live this love of Jesus. Brothers together as a province and provinces together as a Congregation are called to live that compassion especially for the poor.

I know that, as a Visitor, sometimes lots of your attention, energy and care has to be directed inwardly, toward the members of the province. Yet we cannot allow that care to absorb us completely. We are called to move outward with our care and concern for, with and from the reality of the poor. Encouraging our confreres in the province to do the same can bring about much healing and renewal of heart, because, as Saint Vincent clearly reminds us, it is among the poor that we discover true religion. It is in union with them, in solidarity with them that we find the way to salvation.

I urge you, as Visitors, together with the members of your province, to be continually concerned with the poor about issues of justice and peace. I urge you to either establish or to guarantee that you or members of your provinces are involved in Commissions of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Such commissions exist on the international and national levels. I also encourage you to have greater contact with our representative before the United Nations, Father Joseph Foley. Joe, as you saw in the report and in other reports, as well as on his website, encourages us to be involved in many initiatives for the good of the poor, with the poor. I encourage you to reflect on these materials, elaborated both by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission, as well as the documents from our NGO representative at the United Nations, in order that the compassion we have for the poor as a Congregation might move us from an affective love toward a more effective love.

I conclude my comments, at the end of this meeting of Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission, asking forgiveness, as your Superior General, for the times that I have not acted from a perspective of a good shepherd. I ask your prayers for me and for my Assistants that we might work in a unified way to help promote the spiritual and apostolic life of the entire Congregation of the Mission; that we, as a General Council, might be able to deepen our compassion for you, as Visitors, and for those members of your provinces in our deliberations with you in all matters, whether informal or formal.

As we share the Eucharist this day, let us firmly believe that this is the sacrament of God's love, which has been poured out for us and which we receive in our hearts. United around this table of the Lord, may we move forward in our faithfulness to Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." in a cursive script.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

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**The Vincentian Charism
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